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1962/06/06

391. Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara

JCSM-431-62

Washington, June 6, 1962.

SUBJECT

Laos (U)

1. Reference is made to the draft memorandum prepared by the Interdepartmental Working Group on Laos and Thailand, dated 4 June 1962,¹ subject as above.

2. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are of the opinion that the draft memorandum in its present form states the present problem, those problems which could develop and several possible solutions more realistically than similar past papers on the subject.

3. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are also of the opinion that the suggestions offered in the draft memorandum could offer a more ready and positive solution to these problems, should they be modified to:

a. Shift the emphasis from suggesting responses to enemy efforts to suggesting offensive actions we could initiate.

b. Delete certain minimums and limitations that could be advantageous to the enemy and/or reduce our effectiveness. For example, the basic brunt of operations in Laos is assigned to the United States and a lesser role to the Thais. Little provision is made for active participation by FAR forces. Although the FAR has proven itself to be relatively ineffective, it is a military asset which should be exploited in any operations in Laos.

c. Cite as a minimum initial action, rather than as a minimum, denial of control of the Mekong River Valley to the enemy. To do otherwise would abrogate the previously stated intent of obtaining North Vietnamese withdrawal from Laos.

d. Indicate that an enemy drive into the Mekong Valley areas should initiate immediate and adequate action on our part to eliminate such a threat, rather than an equally sharp response on our part.

e. Indicate that Vientiane should be held. This is one area where FAR forces could be used to advantage and could provide a valuable link-up with the Meo.

f. Expand consideration of the threshold of communist activity beyond which we find their actions intolerable to include personnel and logistic buildups as well as active operations. Such buildups, if not responded to in time, could place us in the position of not being prepared to take timely measures to stop an enemy action once it has started.

g. Expand the reference to a possible communist full-scale offensive in response to air attacks on selected targets in Laos to include the

Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, OSD Files: FRC 66 A 3542, Laos 381. Top Secret.

¹ Tab A to Document 387.

equally likely possibility that such air attacks could limit the communist ability to mount such an offensive.

h. Expand the reference to possible Communist Chinese intervention in response to air attacks in North Vietnam to include the possibility that such air attacks could deter such intervention.

i. Remove the limitations on air action in Laos and North Vietnam. To be effective in Laos, air actions should be widespread against selected targets (LOC's, airfields, supply dumps, airlift, etc.) rather than limited to a communist breach of the cease-fire. If carried into North Vietnam, heavy attacks against selected military targets throughout the country should prove more effective than a massive (area) attack on Hanoi.

j. Remove the limitations on the force strength required for an amphibious operation in the Vinh area, since force strength will depend upon the condition and disposition of opposing forces at the time the landing is desired. In all probability it would exceed the one division strength cited.

4. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also recommend that you note the interim planning guidance provided CINCPAC and COMUSMACTHAI by JCS 4875.²

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

L. L. Lemnitzer³

Chairman

Joint Chiefs of Staff

²Not found.

³Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

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